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**IBHP** INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PLAN

# Connections

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## New Year - Old Reflections

by **Tom Farner**

The new year is here and you know what that means. People have vowed to lose weight, stop smoking, stick to a budget, save money, find a better job, become more organized, exercise more, be more patient, eat better, drink less, and \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your own resolution).

New Year resolutions have been with us for 4,000 years, ever since the Babylonians began celebrating the start of each new planting cycle. They really knew how to ring in the new year. They'd party for 11 days, with each day devoted to a theme, before packing up their party hats and pulling out their plows.

Even the king got involved. The festive folk would symbolically strip the king of his robes and send him away for several days—just to make sure no authorities were around to dampen the party atmosphere. (Think your boss would be open to such a tradition?)

I'm all for New Year resolutions. In fact, I seem to like them so much that I make them all the time, even without waiting for January 1. I make so many resolutions that my one New Year resolution this year was to make fewer resolutions.

But do I keep these resolutions? Do you keep your resolutions?



A study at the University of Washington found some interesting answers. Among people in their study group, 67% made at least three resolutions for the coming new year, and 63% of them stuck with their No. 1 resolution for at least two months. Conclusion: about two out of every five people

make and keep a

resolution, at least for a while.

Another study, this one conducted by the American Medical Association, found that only 40% of their study participants had any intention of making New Year resolutions. Half of these people went on to keep their promises. Conclusion: one in five people make New Year commitments and turn them into action.

If the Roman god Janus were around today, he'd have a thing or two to say about this. Enshrined in ancient mythology, he was the god of change, transitions, and beginnings. The Romans named the first month of the year after him.

Janus had two faces, one looking forward, the other backward. This showed his ability to watch entrances and exits. Symbolically, it signaled the need to balance our hopes for tomorrow with a keen awareness of what happened yesterday.

continued on page 2

It strikes me that Janus might know why so many resolutions are forgotten by February. Could it be that we're only looking forward-when we should be looking back in equal measure? We have New Year resolutions. What about Old Year reflections?

Surveys show that rashly made resolutions are the first to fall by the wayside. The University of Washington study found that 65% of their study subjects made their promises between December 28 and New Year's Day. These were the folks most likely to fall off the resolution wagon within a few weeks.

In contrast, resolutions that stick are almost always backed by a strong personal commitment to change. And commitment depends on deep reflection, including an honest look at what unfolded during the recent past. As Janus would tell you, it's not enough to look at the entrance; the exit calls for attention as well.

Much of this reflection is done individually and around dinner tables. But why not open a dialogue in the workplace, too? The arrival of a new year gives us the perfect nudge.

How to proceed? Simple. Make a point of getting together with your colleagues to carve a collective resolution in stone. But don't agree on anything-don't even talk in terms of action-until you've reflected on the past year. Here are several

questions you can use in your work group to seed the dialogue:

- If a headline and news article were written to capture our work group's accomplishments for the year, what would they say?
- Forget metrics, scorecards, and all the measurable stuff for a moment. What are we plain old proud of from this past year?
- What values were most important to us as the year began? What values seem to be paramount right now? Why the change?
- What would we do differently at work if given the chance to circle back and relive one week of our choosing?
- What did we learn at work this past year, and how did we learn it?
- Did we stay in touch with our deep interests as individuals, and were we able to apply these passions in the workplace?
- How well did we nurture a sense of community and teamwork while valuing and leveraging people's unique knowledge, talents, skills, and interests?

Questions like these will spark other questions and open the way to a meaningful conversation. It won't be the easiest or quickest exchange in recent memory, and at first, it might make your metric-

**continued on page 4**

## Here We Go Again

*by Tom Farner, LMFT, LCPC is a BPA BH clinical specialist in the areas of family counseling, hypnotherapy, and biofeedback.*

It's a new year and the annually recommitted American public are only weeks into their determined pledge to lose weight. For many, this valiant effort is a hideous cycle fortified each year by the newest diet craze. Statistics tell us that less than five percent of us will permanently keep the weight off, but undaunted and seduced by a clever thirty billion dollar diet industry, we still hold out for a miracle.

The World Health Organization claims the prevalence of obesity is now doubling every five years and sixty-five percent of American adults are overweight. These disturbing trends are confusing when so many magic formulas are available to the public. Daily, television commercials tell us of products that melt away pounds during sleep and radio spots advertise a product that works faster than starvation. With all

this "help" it is bewildering why we still have a need for scales.

Diet gimmicks are inherently self-defeating. In the first place, a diet is too frequently seen as something you do for a period of time and then stop. Secondly, dieting subscribes to the theory that food is the adversary instead of personal habits. Thirdly, dieters cruise through the likes of Atkins, South Beach, and Zone as if it were a lifelong game to find painless results and convinced it does them no harm.

CBS News reports that the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center announced in 2004 that yo-yo dieting (a pattern of weight cycling up and down) is a dangerous activity. The study concentrated on the nature of killer cells that are essential to the human

**continued on page 3**

# Mental Health Disorders in America

*by Journal of Employee Assistance, 4th Quarter 2004*

A Rand Corporation survey found that depression alone accounts for \$12 billion in lost workdays each year,<sup>1</sup> and several recent studies have documented the growing need for mental health services:

- One-third of Americans have needed mental health treatment within the past two years, but 37 percent of those who needed such treatment did not receive it.<sup>2</sup>
- Of those receiving treatment, 30 percent did not need the treatment they received.<sup>3</sup>
- Mental health disorders are the fourth leading cause of disability in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Disease Management Association of America, 70 percent of healthcare visits are driven by a behavioral factor. In fact, depression co-occurs with chronic conditions at alarming rates, as in people with the following disorders:

- 30 percent of cancer patients;
- 27 percent of patients with diabetes;

- 70 percent of patients with diabetic complications;
- 18-20 percent of patients suffering from cardiovascular disease;
- 40-65 percent of patients suffering from heart attacks;
- 10-27 percent of patients suffering from stroke; and
- 45-70 percent of patients with multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, Parkinson's disease, and hemophilia.

1 Rand Corporation. *Therapy in America: Mental Health Treatment Goes Mainstream*. 2004. Harris Interactive.

2 *Therapy in 2004*, Study Conducted by Harris Interactive on Behalf of PacificCare Behavioral Health and Psychology Today.

3 *Therapy in 2004*, Study Conducted by Harris Interactive on Behalf of PacificCare Behavioral Health and Psychology Today.

4 National Mental Institute of Health, 2001 January, revised 2003, May. The numbers count: Mental disorders in America (NIMH Publication No. 01-4584).

## Here We Go Again... (continued from page 2)

immune system in killing viruses and other threatening agents. The study states that repeated weight loss and gain of over ten pounds leads to the body's inability to defend against disease. Thinking that all those heroic past efforts might have been harmful is enough to make you want to get a Big Mac with fries, but we all know that is not the answer.

The American public is eating less fat and getting fatter. We were first told that fat was bad, then sugar, and now carbohydrates. Another culprit will undoubtedly soon raise its menacing head. Truth is, people don't know what to believe anymore. They have survived cabbage soup diets in the 1970's to current gorging on bacon and heavy cream. One Toronto dietitian, Liz Pearson, states that "The crazier, the more absurd the diet, people somehow think it must work." Perhaps it's time to apply an old American remedy to the problem: common sense. Unglamorous as it might sound, the surest lifestyle change is still eating less and exercising more.

Excess and convenience are the norm in America. Why are we surprised that we are fighting weight? Somewhere along the way we went from moderation to the philosophy of Miss Piggy, who

you may recall advised, "never to eat more than you can lift." Lifestyle changes such as longer work hours, less time to prepare meals at home, and marketing of convenience foods are certainly some of the contributing factors. It is certain that America has to become thinner to maintain health. We all know that if we keep doing what we're doing, we'll keep getting what we're getting.

Most successful weight loss comes from changing bad habits instead of finding miraculous foods. It requires denying eating for recreation and seeking instant gratification from food. It necessitates increased activity because when people are enthused and moving, food becomes less important. It demands nothing less than self-change to a healthier life style of eating better, smaller portions, drinking more water, tracking intake, and being on the move. Contrary to a diet, it has no ending period and even though it has dips and gains, it becomes a committed life-long project. It's not a quick fix or easy formula, but over time it does produce more energy, clearer thinking, and oh yes, a smaller waist. If this doesn't sound worthwhile, you might want to check out a sign I saw today advertising low-carb pizza, whatever that is.

minded colleagues a bit queasy. But it could be the most honest and revealing conversation you have all year.

Thoughtful answers to questions like those above will point you and others to just the right resolutions

for the coming year. There's no need to light candles to Janus. Some serious reflection on the past will shine a much brighter light on how you and your co-workers can shape the future.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Inside this issue...*

**New Year - Old  
Reflections**

**Here We Go  
Again**

**Mental Health  
Disorders in  
America**